BOARD INVOLVEMENT

All too often one hears, "Our board members just won't get involved. What can we do?" There is no off-the-shelf-remedy for an uninvolved board, but in trying to identify the problem and coming up with a solution, it's always good to start with the obvious.

- **What's your trustee recruiting plan look like?** Involved boards begin with people who are committed to the library and anxious to be involved. The current board must be proactive in encouraging good people to seek board appointments, and should search year-round for good candidates. Keep a file of names for consideration well into the future.

- **Do your meeting agendas invite involvement?** You have to ask yourself why any trustee would want to come to a monthly meeting where members are seldom asked to contribute their opinions, make judgments, and take action. They don't attend board meetings to listen to hours of reports, many of which were already sent to them in the meeting packets. Encourage involvement by having an agenda that invites opinions, asks for decisions, and in all ways demonstrates that trustee time is valued and their opinion counts.

- **Do you have a strategic or long-range plan developed by the board?** When trustees are involved in the planning process from the beginning, they develop ownership of the plan and a commitment to carrying it out. The plan should assign specific functions to the board, among them reviewing it periodically—semiannually at the least, preferably quarterly.

Board members don't usually get involved for the recognition they'll get for their efforts. However, if you want to continue their strong involvement, give them recognition for those efforts. We never outgrow our appreciation for praise of a job well done. Simple thanks from the board president or library director for a trustee's extra efforts is powerful and inexpensive.

Nor is it inappropriate to acknowledge the service of a volunteer board by hanging individually framed photos of each trustee near the library entrance—plus there's the added bonus of letting the public know who their library board members are. And, while you have a photographer handy, get a digital print that can be added to the library's website with a brief bio of each trustee.

BUILDING THE AGENDA

The agenda is the framework that supports the meeting and is a terrific tool to keep meetings focused—but only when it is diligently managed and followed. While the president is responsible for the pace of following the agenda, both s/he and the library director should collaborate in creating it. Sending an email to the other trustees to call for agenda items is recommended.

The traditional format no longer works well for truly productive meetings. The "new business" is generally last and is usally what requires the board's greatest attention, yet it comes when concentration is waning and members are anxious to "get it over with" and move on to adjournment. Yet, these are the very items that deserve the attention of the board at its best. This is especially true if too much time has been spent on nonessential agenda items. Think of your meeting time as a "bell curve"; the most important decisions are left to the low end of the curve.

The idea of separating old and new business is an artificial one. Does it really matter? The library board needs to make a decision once they have all the information needed and whether that is done in one meeting or more is inconsequential.

The typical agenda covers three types of business: what is required by law; information sharing; decision making—in that order. The order is flexible, however, as the board can apply the Bell Curve to put the required items first (in the low beginning of the curve where members are getting acclimated and latecomers are arriving), the decision items in the middle (where attention and productivity are highest), and save the information items for last (where attention starts to fade and early leavers are gone).

A typical agenda format might look like this

Opening
    Call to Order
    Review Agenda

Public Comment

Consent Agenda
    Approval of Minutes
    Approval of Financial Reports and Payment Voucher

Business
    Item #1
    Item #2
    Item #3
    Item #4

Reports
Adjourn

Let's address the business items in more detail. A good agenda will not only list the items, but give a brief annotation and use a verb to indicate what outcome is desired. For example, the items above might be:

    Item #1   Discuss after-hours security

    Item #2   Review insurance specs

    Item #3   Select CPA for audit

    Item #4   Review Standards on Facilities

Either as part of the Agenda itself or on a separate page of Notes on the Agenda, each item needs to be briefly explained. For example, the first item might include such information as what security exists now, why it needs changing (if indeed it does), what options are reasonable to consider, how it would impact the budget, and possibly include price quotes or estimates.

Reports given to the board are usually information sharing, and differ library from library. Director's Report and Regional Consultant's Report are standard, but key staff, committees of the board, and Friends are also common in many libraries.

OMA – ORA RECEIPTS

All public libraries, whether taxing districts or units of local government, are required to observe Kentucky's Open Meetings Act (OMA) and Open Records Act (ORA). These are statutes that are strictly enforced by the Attorney General's (AG) office and, as such, the AG requires every member of all governing entities to file a signed receipt acknowledging the receipt of information about both OMA and ORA.

Last year copies were given to entire boards, but each year, thereafter, all newly appointed trustees will need to be furnished with copies. They can be found at http://ag.ky.gov/civil/alert.htm. There are a total of three (3) documents to download: *Your Duty Under the Law* and *Managing Public Records* are the text files; the receipt which requires your signature is found further down the page as *Certificate of Receipt of Written Documentation*.

This requirement is a result of a new law, KRS 15.275, and is ultimately the local county judge-executive's responsibility and it is he or she to whom the receipt is given. It would be a nice gesture on the part of the library, however, to go ahead and furnish the documents and obtain the signed receipts.

The purpose of all this is to educate elected and appointed governmental bodies about compliance with OMA and ORA. This topic is often confusing to boards and has been addressed in several articles in earlier additions of "T3" in some detail. If you would like a reprint of any articles on either law, you may contact the editor (see box for contact information) and request either an electronic copy or a hard copy.

Your local regional consultant is a resource for specific questions regarding your board.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Kentucky Revised Statues mandate that library board officers be elected every two years (KRS 173.500; 173.735). Some boards, by virtue of terms ending, may find themselves electing a new officer in their "off" year, but a new slate should be voted in every other year to comply with the law.

Officers may have unlimited terms, unlike seats on the board itself, but it is often a good idea to change leadership and try someone new in the president's chair. Be aware that the office of vice-president is not the same as president-elect; it is not an automatic change, nor should it even be an assumed change.

The statutory requirement for which officers a board must have vary slightly, depending upon how the library was established, but all need a president, secretary, and treasurer. It only makes good sense to elect a vice-president for those times the president is absent. The newly revised "Kentucky Public Library Trustee Manual", soon to be released, describes the duties of each office in some detail.

LIBRARY LETTERS

Dear Marian Librarian,

Our library director creates our board meeting agenda. After all, the director knows what we need to talk about, so why should we be involved?

-- Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

There is nothing wrong with the library director constructing the agenda if that is what the board wishes. But s/he should confer with the board president, or whomever will be chairing the meeting, to see that all issues that need to be addressed are included. Soliciting agenda items from the rest of the board ahead of time is also a good idea. That way, any background information can be readily available. However, there is generally an approval of the agenda after the call to order but before anything else. This allows any last minute items of business to be added, though it is good business to keep such late additions to a minimum.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"When we build a public library, we don't have to pay to get in, but when we build a stadium, we have to pay the owner every time we go to a game."

Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura

"Before the week is out, be a patriot: Encourage a child to fall in love with a book. Apply for a library card. And accept the ALA's invitation to Let Freedom Read."

Linda Campbell, Ft Worth Star-Telegram

"At the moment that we persuade a child, any child, to cross that threshold, that magic threshold into a library, we change their lives forever, for the better. It's an enormous force for good."

Sen. Barack Obama

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